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ABSTRACT

One professional translator's experiences in teaching a course on the problems of English/Spanish literary translation, using a number of Spanish and Russian poems and short stories and their different kinds of translations for texts are discussed. The process of analyzing the literature for translation difficulties is outlined, as well as specific issues relating to word usage, meter, rhyme, and cultural differences. Russian poems were used to illustrate the significance of meter in translating appropriately. The focus is on accurate translation of the sense of the text without sacrificing style. Portions of the report are transcripts of classroom discussion. At the end of the course, the students were asked to back-translate some British poems from their Spanish translations into the original English. (MSE)

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CAN LITERARY, NAY, POETIC TRANSLATION BE TAUGHT? A CONFERENCE INTERPRETER THINKS

by Sergio Viaggio, U.N.

Back in the fall of '87 I got a call from Prof. Renée Waldinger, head of the Translation Department at CUNY's Graduate School. Comparative Literature needed someone to teach a course in Problems in English/Spanish Literary Translation; Prof. Gregory Rabassa, the originally scheduled lecturer, was not available; would I be willing to take over? Would I be willing! But what to teach? How to structure the classes? I knew where to begin: I did remember a bilingual edition of the poems of Jorge Luis Borges and Walter Arndt's marvel *Pushkin Threefold*, wherein, together with the original, he gives the reader a linear translation and a metric one. Not only that: since even the most faithful and prosaic linear translation will of necessity differ, at least syntactically, from the original, Arndt takes the painstaking trouble of letting the reader in on it by italicising every single departure. I also took advantage of some Spanish metric translations I had concocted in my college years (though I never told my students they were by me), and one of my students provided some by Babette Deutsch; so we ended up with one linear and two metric English translations and one metric Spanish each of "*A Winter Evening*," "*On Vorontsov*" and "*Ex Unge Leonem*."

Only one of my students spoke Russian (the rest, fourteen in all, knew English and Spanish --as either A or B-- or, in one case, English and Italian. The student who knew Russian did also speak French, but not Spanish.) Still, Pushkin --or rather Arndt-- was the centrepiece of the theoretical part of the course. Meanwhile, I selected two short stories, "*Mr. Know-All*" by Somerset Maugham and Julio Cortázar's "*Liliana Ilorando*," to have them work with. I also had the Department reproduce a bunch of articles on translation (see list at the end), centred on Brian Mossop's indispensable "*The Translator as Rapporteur*" and Peter Newmark's triad on Semantic vs. Communicative Translation. Then it struck me that the opening pages of *Adán Buenosayres* by Argentine writer Leopoldo Marechal, with its wonderful description of B.A., and several similar passages about London in Dickens could be neatly used to compare originals (Marechal uses Spanish very much in the way Dickens wields English); so I delved into *Dombey & Son* and, sure enough, found what I was looking for.

So by the end of the first week I had all the material I wanted. The next problem was what to do with it. As I mentioned, I arrived the first day with a couple of Borges's poems and their translations plus all the theoretical literature. I started off with a disclaimer and a *caveat*: I am not a native speaker of English, although I love the language dearly and know it fairly well. Nevertheless, to know a language fairly well is hardly enough to write literature in it, and that, after all, is what any literary translator must do best. I am, on the other hand, a good translator and a better reader, and I also write poetry and prose in Spanish. I was, then, suitably qualified to teach them what translation is, and how to go about reading with a translator's eye. Also, due to the short notice, I would be improvising as we went along, so would they please feed me back constantly.

My conscience clean, off I teed with my indefectible 'Glass' example [see Viaggio (1987)] and proceeded to analyse translation from the theoretical point of view, emphasising the need to deverbalise and to take full stock of the situation. Next I delivered a mini-lecture on literary analysis and poetics, emphasising the different rhythmic and phonic patterns of English and Spanish. I spoke of the tremendous advantage of the Saxon/Latin cohabitation in English and the way it was put to literary use (Shakespeare, Dickens), of its phonemic wealth, which allows for such an exasperating amount of monosyllabic words, of its vast onomatopoeic faculties and reticence to music. I pointed out that advantages and disadvantages are always relative to the communicative task at hand: No, there's no way of screaming "*Methought I heard a voice cry 'Sleep no more!'*" in eleven Spanish syllables; but then one can neither sing "*Hermosa soledad, verde y sonora,*" lingering on the vowels, in an English five-foot iamb.

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Speakers, and foremost among them the great masters, use their language the way it is best, and different languages offer different means of expression for the same sensitivity.

As I have mentioned, this course was improvised from start to finish. I chose to begin with poetic translation simply because I could lay hands upon the relevant material right away and, also, because short poems, self-contained and relatively easy to grasp and analyse in full at one sitting, allowed me to illustrate in a nutshell the myriad different and competing problems a literary translator faces. I chose Borges's "*El Patio*" first in view of its linguistic and aesthetic simplicity. That allowed me to shun altogether any questions of meter, rhyme, alliterations and the like. Next, I proceeded to "*Fundación mítica de Buenos Aires*," whose only 'formal' features were the alexandrines and assonant rhymes. It introduced, though, some interesting *realia*. The course began in earnest with Pushkin.

"*El Patio*" is young Borges: short, simple, colloquial, direct. My first question was, "What kind of a place does the poem conjure up in you?" Needless to say, no one came up with the typical colonial patio in an old Buenos Aires house (the following class I showed them a picture of one.)

EL PATIO

Con la tarde
se cansaron los dos o tres colores del patio.
La gran franqueza de la luna llena
ya no entusiasma su habitual firmamento.
Patio, cielo encauzado.
El patio es el declive
por donde se derrama el cielo en la casa.
Serena,
la eternidad espera en la encrucijada de las estrellas.
Grato es vivir en la amistad oscura
de un zaguán, de una parra y de un aljibe.

PATIO

With evening
the two or three colors of the patio grew weary.
The huge candor of the full moon
no longer enchants its usual firmament.
Patio: heaven's watercourse.
The patio is the slope
down which the sky flows into the house.
Serenely
eternity waits at the crossway of the stars.
It is lovely to live in the dark friendliness
of covered entrance way, arbor, and wellhead.
[Robert Fitzgerald]

I began by discussing the title and the colon. Why not 'The Patio'? Why not a comma between 'Patio' and 'heaven's watercourse'? 'The Patio' would perhaps have been too specific; but just plain 'Patio' I find too vague. Whatever our preferences, one thing stood clearly out: Spanish and English articles --and their absence-- do not match: a capital insight into the need to de-verbalise, i.e. forget about the specific words in the original, from the very start; *ditto* punctuation marks. Next I pointed out the enormous wealth of connotations and associations the first couple of lines could give rise to. Two features stood out: the 'weary' colours and their being 'two or three,' itself a lazy and/or belittling account. It's dusk: we have a scene in pastels; things become contours, more and more half-etched, as if they grew sleepy and

tired of showing all their lines and angles; they have aged and turned melancholic.

All that through the unexpected collocations *'dos o tres'* + 'colores' + *'se cansaron.'* No 'poetic' words; no 'poetic' syntax; no rhythm; no rhyme... *"La gran franqueza de la luna llena / ya no entusiasma su habitual firmamento."* Again, the whole trick is played by unusual collocations: *'gran franqueza'* + *'luna,'* *'entusiasma'* + *'firmamento,'* and *'habitual'* + *'firmamento,'* as well as a stylistic clash: *'firmamento'* (as opposed to the expected *'cielo'*). Now, *'gran'* can mean both 'big' and 'great,' but English denies us a word so neatly polysemic, so the translator must choose to convey one of the two senses; which one? Obviously, the wideness/vastness of the moon is what *'gran'* is alluding to. We checked the translation: "The huge candor of the full moon / no longer enchants its usual firmament." To my mind, none of the key moments has been properly rendered or compensated for. 'Huge' is too three-dimensional; 'vast' would have been better and even more striking as a collocate. 'Enchants' is nothing short of banal. Will 'enthuse' do? We all agreed that the medicine was worse than the malady, as the Spanish saying goes (with a playful alliteration chipped in for good measure). Still, there's no 'magic' or 'charm' in Borges's moon. To this day, I haven't been able to come up with anything remotely satisfactory, but I'd much rather go for 'excites,' 'fills with excitement' or something like it. 'Firmament,' on its part, forces the hand; it is too un-colloquial (I pointed out that the 'same' words can be stylistically more or less marked in different languages) and, therefore, overcharged. Can the excessive 'firmament' offset the weak 'charms'? No, compensation is not the sum of two evils, but the restoring of balance. 'Heavens' would undoubtedly have been a better choice, but the translator had already used it. *'Grato'* is not 'lovely' at all, just plain 'nice' or, less colloquially, 'pleasant.'

Of course, not being a native speaker of English, I may well be partially or totally wrong in my assessment of the translation, but I know Spanish, poetics, literature, Borges and Buenos Aires well, which qualifies my analysis of the original. For my didactic purposes, that was enough. We were there to detect and diagnose problems; solutions, if found, would come as a bonus.

Another interesting problem was the game of *'truco,'* an Argentine (and Uruguayan) *realium*, in the "Mythical Foundation of Buenos Aires." The lines go *"Un almacén rosado como revés de naipe / sahumó y en la trastienda conversaron un truco."* Again an unusual collocation: *'conversar'* + *'truco.'* The *'almacén'* is a general store *cum* bar where the newly-urban gauchos mingled with the recently arrived poor immigrants. *'Truco'* is more than a game originally played by the gauchos; it's a challenge to the players' ability to lie and mislead: each of four players is dealt but three cards, yet it can take ten minutes for a hand to be played. If you don't know the game, even if you can read the original, the metaphor will be completely lost upon you: a Mexican wouldn't be able to make head or tail of it.

No translator can hope to convey all that in the body of the translation; so what does he do? He can choose one of several approaches: cop out and omit the whole thing, keep the *realium* (and explain it in a footnote), generalise, or put in a *realium* familiar to the reader. This is Alastair Reid's solution: *"A general store pink as the back of a playing card / Shone bright [?!]; in the back there was poker talk."* If Borges only knew his gauchos would end up playing poker! It is as ridiculous as having Wild Bill Hickock shot dead at a truco table. They are not even the same cards: *truco* is played with Spanish cards, forty to a deck, no eights, nines or tens, no queens ('horses,' i.e. knights, instead); no spades, or clubs, or hearts, or diamonds... you get, I hope, the picture. And whatever became, by the way, of the alexandrines (and their assonant *abba* rhyme structure)? The kind of translation people should be punished for committing.

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By class three, Pushkin had been introduced (he's my favourite poet, so I know him well enough). The reason I opted for working with an original my students could not understand was simple: a translation must be perceived as an original and valued on its own literary merits. The first piece we lay hands upon was "*Ex Unge Leonem*," one of those devastating epigrammes the poet was renowned and feared for. First, I read the Russian aloud. I then read it once more and asked them to listen to the music and follow the 'lyrics' in Arndt's linear version. I explained that four-foot iamb is the Russian verse par excellence (the only poem in that meter we used, though, was the short epigramme on Vorontsov), and that it was a must for paroxytonic and oxytonic rhymes to alternate regularly. We saw that it is well nigh impossible to maintain such alternation in English and useless in Spanish, since the ear barely notices the effect.

May I take the liberty of quoting almost verbatim that particular class (I recorded most of them). I have only edited some obvious repetitions, a couple of irrelevant asides and all my mistakes:

"Let us start first of all with "*Ex Unge Leonem*" in English. I'd like one of you to tell us what she gleaned from this poem, what she liked and disliked and why; in either case, i.e. I want your reactions as readers.

Ex Unge Leonem

Njedávno ja stikhámi kák-to svístnul
I výdal ikh bez pódpisi svojéj;
Zhurnálny shut o nikh statjéjku tísnul,
Bez pódpisi zh pustív jejó, zlodjéj.
Nu chto-zh? Ni mnje, ni ploshadnómu shútu
Nje udalós prikryt svoikh prokáz:
On po kogtjám uznál mjenjá v minútu,
Ja po ushám uznál jevó kak raz!

[Not long ago I gave a little flick in verses
And issued them without my signature;
Some clown of a journalist printed a little piece about [them,
Releasing it without signature, the cad.
But fancy! Neither I nor [that] gutter clown
Succeeded in concealing our tricks:
He knew me in a minute by my talons,
I knew him by his ears right enough.]

What does the title mean? Let us proceed as translators. We don't know Latin. Obviously the title must have something to do with the poem, so we will probably find a few clues in it. What we have to do is search for them and --we hope-- find them. Before we do, can we at least have any orientation of what the title might mean? We know '*leonem*' is 'lion.' Is there any other word we know? '*Ex*'! Not that we know what it's doing here, but it's an old face. What do we know it to mean? 'Former.' It must have another meaning which English or Spanish have not inherited. It cannot be a 'former lion,' right? Are you familiar with the expression '*ex cathedra*'? It means to deliver a lecture, to speak 'from' the dais. For those who know "*Così fan tutte*": "*Ho i crini già grigi, ex cathedra parlo...*" "My hair is grey, I speak 'from' experience." So what we have there is a 'from' or an 'out of.' We still don't know what it means here, but we're trying to go through our files; in my case, opera, Mozart suddenly come to the rescue. This is the way a translator works: Every conceivable piece of knowledge stored there beneath heaps of rubble in our memory's attic can be used.

What does the poem say? What is Pushkin calling this journalist? An ass! Why? 'I knew him by his ears.' Because he had called Pushkin what? A lion: He had known him by his talons, '*ex unge*' ('*unge*' is 'nail,' 'claw,' 'talon' in

Latin). *'Ex Unge Leonem'* (the verb is elided): by the talons, by the claws you can tell the lion. 'He knew me by my talons, I knew him by his ears.' 'I'm a lion, he's an ass,' in the British sense of the word, a donkey.

We don't have to know Latin to guess it, if we go the right way. And what we are learning in this course is precisely to find that way. For instance, *'leonem'* must have something to do with lion. I know that Latin is inflected, so this must be 'lion' in one of the cases. *'Ex'* is a preposition, in all probability *'ex'* demands that lion be inflected and that's what that *'-em'* is doing there after *'leon;'* it's the accusative. Now I know 'ex' to mean 'former.' It can't be. Then I try and ask myself, do I know any Latin proverbs or phrases that might give me a clue, like *'ex cathedra'* or *'e pluribus unum'*, that 'e' is the 'ex' without the 'x': 'Out of many - one.' *'Ex aequo et bono'*: 'Because it's good and it's fair,' a legal phrase. Member *'ex officio'* of a Board: He has the right to be there 'because' of his position, 'due to,' 'out of.' All this we can infer without going to a Latin dictionary (which would be the first thing to do if we wanted to translate).

Remember: from now on we have to read as translators. It is not enough to read as we used to. We must pick up every possible clue, question every single word, even the ones that look most obvious. And they may indeed be obvious; after you question them, it may so happen that this tree is indeed a tree. But you cannot satisfy yourselves with knowing beforehand that normally a tree is a tree. Is it a tree <u>here</u>?

So, let's proceed to the poem, sticking to the linear translation. Let us see what Pushkin said in Russian, never mind whether he said it more agreeably than this. "Not long ago I gave a little..." What happened? Obviously, he published a poem anonymously. "...releasing it without signature." What happened next? It seems that a journalist knew who wrote the poem, and said, "You are not fooling me." Probably, he used the phrase 'ex unge leonem' in his article. "You can hide your name but you cannot hide your talons!" And Pushkin is using that against him in the end. You don't know, but it's a very educated guess, isn't it? "But fancy, neither I nor... tricks." What's that? "He knew who I was, I know who he was." Why? "He knew me in a minute by my talons, I knew him by his ears right enough." The moment he read my poem he knew it had been written by a lion, the moment I read his review I knew it had been written by an ass. That's the essence. Just as a one-liner, it would have done well enough. Imagine the Bentsen-Quayle debate: "I can tell you by your foxy ways, Senator." "And I can tell you also by your asinine bray, Senator." That could have been a fantastic one-liner. Now this, besides, is also a poem.

The poem is built around that epigramme. What we have in the linear translation is just the story. We have the lyrics without the music. It doesn't sound as pretty as *"Njedávno ja stikhámi kak-to svístnul."* So, what Walter Arndt does is say "OK; I'm going to try and versify this story. I'll try to come up with a poem in English that will make the same point, that will make as clear to the English reader as this linear translation does what the thing is about, but will provide besides some aesthetic enjoyment and give some notion of what the original sounds like. So that the reader of Pushkin in English can experience an aesthetic feeling of joy, elation, marvel or something akin to what the readers of Pushkin in Russian felt." Of course, it's very much a self-defeating purpose, because Walter Arndt will never mean to the English reader, no matter how fantastic his translation, what Pushkin means to a Russian. The same happens with Borges and me. Borges will never mean to a Colombian what it means to me, but that's extra-linguistic; that has nothing to do with literature as such; it's an emotional bond that goes beyond the words and the sense and is impossible to translate by definition: it is not written. So you give up on that to begin with and try for second best. Let us see how good second best is:

One day I flicked my whip-o-verse a little
And let the thing go out without my name;
Some scribbler pounced on it with ink and spittle
And had them print his piece unsigned, for shame.
Oh, Lord! The hack or I had never reckoned
That our generic marks gave us away:
He knew me by my talons in a second,
I knew him in an instant by his bray.

Who wants to analyse it as a piece of English poetry, good or bad? We are not interested in where it comes from but in what it sounds like. It doesn't have to be a scholarly analysis, but the analysis you would do by yourselves if you wanted to translate it.

[Student: It's fun to read, but I'm sure the Russian is a lot better.]

Never mind. You'll never understand the Russian, will you? What do you care? It's fun to read; that's the main point. Does everybody agree? This book, *Pushkin Threefold*, is fantastic: it gives the original, in Cyrillic; it gives a linear translation, not word for word, because what we read in the first version is not awkward grammar; it just lets you know what it says, only when you say this in Russian it rhymes. And in the third, metric version, Arndt is saying to us "Now this is the way I suggest that we put together, reshuffle those words so that we would come up with a poem in English too." So definitely this is poetry and that is not. The question is, is this good poetry? The epigrammes are meant to poke fun at people. If they're not fun to read, they fail as epigrammes, and if the translations of epigrammes are not fun to read, they fail as translations. If it is fun to read, then it has basically accomplished its task. We still don't know how well, but we can tell that it's got something going for it.

Let's see what it is: The first obvious thing is the rhyme. Rhyme is not simply pretty; there's an aesthetic function to it. It's a relatively new phenomenon. The Greeks didn't know it. The Romans didn't know it. Chinese and Japanese poets don't know it. It's a rather recent European invention. What's the point of rhyme? Again I'm not looking for a scholarly explanation. Try, close your eyes, and say, what's the difference between an expression that rhymes and an expression that doesn't? It becomes synaesthetic. Different kinds of feelings, perceived by different nervous sensorial centers, combine in a whole. So the rhythm, the cadence that you might feel while dancing, plus the sheerly melodic combination of sounds that you may enjoy while listening to music, converge with sense and they neatly meet in the stanza. But, more importantly, rhyme creates an expectation. You know that sooner or later the rhyming word will come, and that generates, on a sheerly phonic basis, a relationship that two words might otherwise not have. Good poets are those who make unconnected words rhyme.

That's why in Spanish it is poor to have grammatical desinences rhyme: *'estaba'* with *'redactaba,'* *'tener'* and *'comer,'* *'dormido'* and *'ido,'* *'teniente'* and *'disidente.'* Those are poor rhymes, since such suffixes rhyme by definition; therefore good poets try to avoid them. It doesn't happen in English: 'Learned' does not rhyme with 'founded' or 'brought' or 'might' or 'could' or 'had.' 'Constitution' and 'declension' don't rhyme in English but *'constitución'* and *'declinación'* do in Spanish. Spanish is a very difficult language for finding nice rhymes because they are all so obvious; which is going to be a problem when we come to the translation of this poem into Spanish. English and Russian have many more sounds than Spanish and, more importantly, many more consonants; which means that there are many more possible rhymes and in general sound effects than in Spanish.

We have, then, this formal structure that "Not long ago..." lacks. What about the rhythm? Is that peculiar to this translation? Did Walter Arndt come

up with the idea of making the English line beat? No, it's typical English prosody. Practically all English lines sound like that. "To sit on rocks, to muse o'er flood and fell, / To slowly trace the forest's shady scene, / Where things that own not man's dominion dwell, / And mortal foot hath ne'er or rarely been..." English and Russian are tonic languages; it's expected; it would have been wrong if he hadn't done it. It wouldn't have sounded English at all, at least not classical English. Not only that: how many beats to a line? It is a five-foot iamb.

Can you think of anything else written in five-foot iamb? Basically, the complete works of William Shakespeare. "If music be the food of art, play on!" is a typical five-foot iamb. Listen to the Russian: *"Njedávno ja stikhámi kak-to svístnul..."* Exactly the same meter. Walter Arndt is not aping the Russian then. It so happens that both systems have the equivalent verse. It's served to him in a platter. English tradition gives him exactly the same material to work with. In Spanish, though, there's no such thing. In Spanish it is the syllable that counts, not the stress. But so far the form in Russian and English is the same. We have the five-foot iamb, we have the eight lines, they all rhyme.

What else can we say about the form of this poem? We are analysing the music before dealing with the lyrics. Is there any other purely formal feature that we can notice? Besides the *ababcdcd* pattern, there's still one other thing that is not so easy to achieve in English. It's not impossible, it's not a feat, but it's already not so much on a platter as the rest. Paroxytones at the end of the odd lines. Again, that's the way it is also in Russian, but in Russian it's easy, so much so that it is expected: One thing you do in Russian is alternate. In English it's very difficult, because most words are monosyllabic, so in order to have that extra syllable you have to look for the paroxytonic word. Of course, there are plenty, but not that many, statistically speaking. Formally, it's very complex. Again, it does nothing but reproduce the form of the original, but for the time being, this I'm whispering in your ear. You have no way of knowing what Pushkin does. We are analysing this as if it were a piece of English poetry.

So far - the melody; we haven't cared a bit about the content. Anything else about the melody before going into analysing actual words? We have the iamb, the trochee, the dactyl, the amphibrach, the anapaest, all of Greek origin. For instance, in Spanish, the only tonic verse is the *decasílabo heroico* and all the martial songs, all the national anthems are in it. *"Oíd mortales el grito sagrado, / libertad, libertad, libertad, / oíd el ruido de rotas cadenas, / ved en trono a la noble igualdad."* That's the Argentine anthem; the Uruguayan anthem: *"Orientales, la patria o la tumba"* etc. etc. And this, the iamb, is the most common foot both in English and in Russian. If you keep it in Spanish, it's cumbersome; it sounds monotonous. You could, it's not that we don't do it because we haven't thought of it, it's no good! Just listen to the three-foot dactyl: */oyd mortá-les el grí-to sagrá-do/*. It is horrible! No wonder all the national anthems are written like this.

Are there any inner rhymes, alliterations, plays on sounds? If they are not obvious, there aren't any, because their point is to be noticed, right? So, we cannot go with the melodic analysis any further. Now let us see to what use this formal scheme is put by the poet, in this case, the translator. Does it sound lofty, for instance in comparison with "To sit on rocks, to muse o'er flood and fell, / To slowly trace the forest's shady scene, / Where things that own not man's dominion dwell, / And mortal foot hath ne'er or rarely been...?"

[Student: 'It sounds flippant.']

It's more than flippant, it's just colloquial; it sounds like the kind of thing one would invent on the spur of the moment, right? Of course we know it must have taken a lot of trouble, but the fact that the trouble doesn't show

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makes it all the more effective. As translators, a question we should ask ourselves is, irrespective of this being very good as it is, whether the original was as flippant, because otherwise it would be betraying the spirit of the original. The only thing we have to go by is that linear translation. How does that linear translation sound, does it sound lofty or doesn't it?

[Student: 'It does not.']

So in all probability style has not been betrayed. And it hasn't. You see how we are approaching this poem, by concentric circles, analysing one at a time, and approaching the message, the meaning, the core from the outside, which is the way we normally read; we may be aware of it or not, but that's the way we do it. So, let us proceed to the next circle.

"*One day I flicked my whip-o-verse a little.*" Does anything strike you in that line? The 'little' and the 'spittle' sound out, so to speak, right? And the 'whip-o'? Had you ever seen that before? No. There are several questions to be asked. Do we like it? First and foremost. That's half the justification. Second, does the original do anything as bold as this? From what we know, what it says is "Not long ago I gave a little flick in verses;" literally, it says "I whistled in verses." What does this "One day I flicked my whip-o-verse a little" say? It's something without importance, I just scribbled something. If we go word for word, there's absolutely nothing except 'verse' in common between the first line of the linear translation and the first line of the metric one. The 'not long ago' becomes 'one day,' the 'gave a little flick in' becomes 'flicked my whip-o-verse.' Does it matter? We all feel that it does not, right? But why? We all agree; but as translators we have to know why, because if it doesn't matter here then may be it doesn't matter at all; and maybe when we wreck our brains to find a word, we're wrecking our brains in vain, we're barking at the wrong tree. That's why it's so important to study this kind of translation, to learn from them the do's and don'ts. Why doesn't it matter? What doesn't change?

The meaning is different, but what remains? The <u>sense</u>! <u>That</u> doesn't change. We can fiddle around with words and meaning, provided that we make the same sense and therefore evoke the same situation, as far as possible, and the same reaction to that same situation, as far as possible; and that is precisely what this translation does. It could, and it can be said otherwise. I brought you a second one that I ran into: a different approach to the same poem by a different translator; but let us concern ourselves only with this one now. The important thing is that Pushkin says: "Some time in the past, not long ago, one day, once upon a time, a few days back --who cares?-- I just scribbled a couple of lines." Only he doesn't say 'scribbled,' he uses a poetic image: "I'm such a born poet, that I write lines like birds sing. I don't even write them, I whistle them." That's what Walter Arndt says. If Pushkin were writing in English, this would be a very plausible way he might have chosen to say exactly the same thing. And that is what we, as translators, try to do. It's impossible to find the answer, of course, but we ask ourselves, what would the author write if he were writing in English, or Spanish, you see? We place ourselves in the poet's shoes; that's why it's so important to translate poets or writers you feel are particularly close to you; so that this mimesis, this stepping into the other guy's shoes isn't that difficult: You can empathise. Let's go on.

"And issued them without my signature," says the original. Now, there are a few modal particles in Russian --which cannot be translated into English because in English they don't exist-- that lighten this 'issued them without my signature' that sounds so formal. There's nothing formal about that second line in Pushkin.

[A minute or so missing as tape is switched]

What would happen if Arndt had changed the lion into a tiger or into a fox? He could have taken the same liberties as above, but he didn't. Is there a reason or is it simply that he didn't have to?

[Student talks]

I'm not questioning at all the last two lines. But why so many liberties above and suddenly such a meticulous care to be as semantic as possible without leaving poetry aside? This is the joke! We began by saying that those two lines could stand on their own. The rest is just the prologue, it's just a lead-up to it, it doesn't really matter; all that can be changed; what cannot be changed is that Pushkin is very cleverly calling himself a lion and his reviewer an ass. Everything else is negotiable; pity that precisely there Arndt had to make this small concession, which goes unnoticed unless we read it the way I'm suggesting we do. Everything's okay, but he switched the sensorial perceptions; it would have been so neat if we had both seeing each other instead of the critic seeing Pushkin and Pushkin hearing him. On the other hand, Arndt improves over Pushkin, since the 'bray' is much more effective as the very last word of the epigramme; a very neat compensantion.

You realise the degree of sophistication and minuteness that reading requires in order to attempt a reasonable translation. And we haven't finished. Of course, we cannot spend the whole course on a poem, I'm just trying to whet your appetite, so to speak. I'm trying to teach you to read because what you haven't understood you cannot translate, and since we are dealing with poetry, understanding the words, understanding this poem as we understand this linear translation, being able to say "Okay, I know what it says, I know what it's about," is not enough; all these other things must be taken into account too. This analysis that we subjected the English to Arndt had to subject the Russian to, so as to glean all the information and see the idiosyncracies in this poem within Pushkin's oeuvre, Pushkin's *oeuvre* within 19th century Russia, 19th century Russia in connection with the Romanticism in Europe, etc., in order finally to come up with this translation. Because this translation has to sound, ideally, Byronian, Shelleyan, Keatsian, or Wordsworthian. I mean, it has to sound more or less like what the English were writing at that time, because Pushkin had not come from another planet; he was the Russian romantic, the way Lamartine was the French romantic.

[Student: Where then is Pushkin? In other words, if you're putting this into the framework of poetry, not in Russia, what is left of Pushkin?]

Oh, no, no. Pushkin is what you begin with. My point is you cannot stop there. You have to travel along these concentric circles, going away from Pushkin. For instance, imagine I produce this fantastic translation, it reads beautifully, but nobody would ever believe that it was written in the 19th century by a 19th century poet. I've come up with an excellent poem but it sounds like Ezra Pound. Who will believe that Pushkin wrote like Ezra Pound? Therefore I succeed as a poet and I fail as a translator. There's nothing wrong in succeeding as a poet and failing as a translator, of course; I think it's better than the alternative.

Now let's go on to the Spanish. We are going to do exactly the same thing: We are going to approach it from without. So, what is the first thing we're going to do? Listen to the melody. (I intentionally use everyday words because they are related to our everyday experience. The moment you start using highfalutin terms it becomes something unemotional.) We have to do exactly the same analysis we performed on Arndt's version and we will use Arndt's linear translation to know exactly where the translator has shorchanged us.

Silbó no ha mucho sin querer en verso
y mandólo sin firma publicar,
un bufón periodista, ¡el muy perverso!,

criticóme en un diario... sin firmar.
Pues bien, ni a mí ni al bufón de marras
resultónos la broma baladí:
Reconocióme al punto él por mis garras,
yo a él por sus orejas le advertí.

[I whistled not long ago unintentionally in verse
And had it published without my signature;
A jester of a journalist -the naughty one!-
Criticised me in a newspaper... without signing.
Well, neither I or the said jester
Managed to get away with our trivial joke:
He knew me in an instant by my talons,
By his ears I found him out.]

What can we say about the rhymes? Same pattern as the English, what about what we would call in Spanish *rimas agudas y llanas*? Exactly the same. In Spanish it's as easy as it is in Russian to alternate stressed and unstressed syllables at the end of the line, but it's not typical to try and play on that. So the translator, either by sheer chance, which I doubt, or in order to mimic the original, says "I'm going to be as faithful as possible. And although this is not normally done in Spanish, it is in Russian, and I'm going to give them a piece of Russian flavour" -although if I didn't explain it to you, you would have never guessed it.

Anything else about the rhyme? They are all consonant, in English and in Spanish and in Russian, i.e. both vowels and consonants are the same. For instance an assonant rhyme would be *'publicar'* and *'animal,'* where only both accentuated a's rhyme. Spanish is known for assonant rhymes; since the Spanish vowels are so important, consonants go almost unnoticed, and that is why assonant rhyme is much more common than in English. But there's something about those rhymes that worries me. *'Publicar'* and *'firmar,'* two infinitives of the first conjugation, that's a cheap rhyme. I could tell you, the translator has an alibi, because in those places Pushkin rhymes *'svístnul'* and *'tísnul,'* which are, respectively, the past tenses of 'to whistle' and to 'throw out' but, as in English and as opposed to Spanish, in Russian not all past tenses rhyme, nor do all infinitives. Here I think the translator didn't find anything better, and probably there wasn't; but the fact that this is as good a translation as you can get doesn't make it ideal. So far - the melody. Any inner rhymes? Inner rhymes, if purposely put, can be very beautiful, otherwise they are tremendously bothersome and, since in Spanish there are so many consonant and assonant rhymes, it's easy to have inner rhymes unwittingly. If they are there by chance, then it's a minus for the translator. Are there any? No, there aren't. Let us see the liberties the Spanish author took: *"Silbé no ha mucho sin querer en verso..."* Our linear translation read: "Not long ago I gave a little flick in verses."

[Student: What does *'ha'* mean there?]

That's an old form of *'hacer.'* And it fits: it's 19th century. And he keeps the whistling, which Arndt had given up on, not because this translator is more faithful, but because he manages to, and besides we agreed it was not of the essence. *"Y mandélo sin firma publicar."* Let us compare this line with "And let the thing go out without my name."

[Student: It has got that tongue-in-cheek.]

Well, it's not that much tongue-in-cheek; it just says what it's supposed to say, not disgracefully, but not very gracefully either.

[Student: It's more literal than Arndt.]

That in itself is not a sin, if by being literal it could be graceful; the problem is that it isn't. It's not a bad line, but it's definitely not as tongue-in-cheek as "And let the thing go out without my name." *"Un bufón periodista, ¡el muy perverso!, criticóse en su diario... sin firmar."*

[Student: Shouldn't *'el muy perverso'* go in parentheses?]

Parentheses are also written-out pauses, it doesn't really matter. *'El muy perverso'* is the equivalent of 'for shame' which stood for the 'cad' in English. Why the two --in fact four-- enclitic pronouns, the pronouns after the fact: *'mandélo'* and *'criticóme,'* instead of *'lo mandé'* and *'me criticó'*? It could be in order to avoid the iamb: */Y lo mandé sin fir-ma pú-blicár/*; but I think it sounds more tongue-in-cheek this way. The iamb is all but unnoticed in many lines, such as *"Pues bien, ni a mí ni al bufón de marras."* My guess is our translator is trying to save the only proclitic pronoun for contrast --and, therefore, emphasis-- at the very end: *'le advertí.'* A way of compensating for the rather unelegant construction

But we stopped short of the analysis: When we analysed the melody we didn't speak about the kind of verse. What kind of verse is this? We have a very neat pattern in English, not so in Spanish. *"Silbé no ha mucho sin querer un verso."* That's already too much regularity, fortunately enough there's no pattern to the rest of the poem - apparently. We know that the Spanish hendecasyllable has one rule: a mandatory accent on the sixth syllable. Except that the mandatory accent on the sixth syllable can be omitted if you have one on the fourth, but then you need one on the eighth. If you want to translate into Spanish, Spanish prosody has to come out. I'm not blaming you for not knowing these things; sometimes translators are unaware that there are such rules, and either they follow them unconsciously or they don't, and then they fail. But you are 'studying' to become translators, in that you want a theoretical apparatus that will help you; this is part of it. I'm going to give you a few notions as we go, but you cannot stop here: You have to go on studying on your own.

Any comments about this last couple of lines? There's a very awkward twist in the last line. The o-a-e synalepha adding insult to the injury of a double accusative: *'Yo a él.'* In Spanish we say *'le di una carta a Juan,'* doubling the accusative, but we don't write it. That's bad enough; but *'le advertí'* is not accusative, is dative. What he wants to say is 'I saw him,' 'I discovered him.' We should perhaps go for *'lo advertí,'* although in Spanish we use *'le'* in the case of accusative masculine. But since *'advertir'* has as its primary meaning 'to warn,' the moment we say *'le advertí'* it sounds rather as 'I warned him' rather than 'I found him out,' so the *'lo'* is doubly necessary; and it's a pity, because I think this last line could easily be mended. Why don't you try? All you have to do is dispose of the double accusative and change the *'le'* into *'lo.'* Obviously, I know why he has the double accusative, he need 11 syllables and the a provides the extra one. Can we somehow or other keep 11 syllables without the awkward twist? Okay, the *'le'* becomes *'lo.'* Then, we have to take away either *'a él'* or *'lo.'* Which one? Let's forget about poetry now; syntactically, which one should go?

[Student: Do we need *'a él'*?]

We need *'él'* in order to keep the emphasis. It is obvious it's 'him,' but I want that parallelism because it's in the original. Which is second best? Do we keep the awkward twist to keep the parallelism or is it too high a price to pay? That's a question serious translators have to ask themselves all the time. Am I paying too high a price to be faithful? In order to be faithful to a great poet, am I not writing lousy poetry? And that's the worst kind of faithfulness, that's like smothering the baby out of love. You'd better leave it alone. So which to choose?

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[Student: I'm in favour of eliminating the double accusative.]

The translator was probably so blinded by the original that he couldn't see. That's why I chose something we could not possibly understand in the original, so that we could read both translations without being blinded by it. It's going to be much more difficult to do it when you understand the original."

This was class four, delivered on October 29, 1988. In class five we went on to "A Winter Evening." The poem is in four-feet trochee; another blessing for this translator, since the Spanish syllabic equivalent of the four-foot iamb, the enneasyllable, is completely atypical, whereas the octosyllable is the most popular verse in Spanish. An analysis of the first stanza proved most illuminating:

Zímni vjécher

Búrja mglóju njébo krójet
Vikhri snjéżhnyje krutja;
To, kak zvjer oná zavójet,
To, zapláchet kak ditjá.
To, po króvlje obvjetshálој
Nam sholómoj zashumít,
To, kak pútnik zapozdálој
Nam v okóshko zastuchít.

a) Arndt's literal translation:

Storm with mist the heavens covers,
Snowy whirlwinds twisting;
Now like a wild beast falls roaring,
Now falls crying like a child,
Now along the wizened roof
Abruptly with the straw it rustles,
Now like a belated wanderer
At our window it will rap.

b) Arndt's metric translation;

Storm has set the heavens scowling
Whirling gusty blizzards wild,
Now they are like beasts a-growling,
Now a-wailing like a child;
Now along the brittle thatches
They will scud with rustling sound,
Now against the window latches
Like belated wanderers pound.

c) Babette Deutsch's translation:

Storm-clouds dim the sky; the tempest
Weaves the snow in patterns wild;
Like a beast the gale is howling,
And now wailing like a child;
On the worn old roof it rustles
The piled thatch, and then again
Like a traveler belated
Knocks upon our window-pane.

c) My translation

Tarde de invierno

La tormenta oscura crece
liando níveos remolinos,
como fiera ruge a veces,
llora a veces como un niño.
A veçes nos silba incierta
por el techo vacilante
o golpea a nuestra puerta
cual tardío caminante.

[Winter Evening]

[Storm grows dark
entwining snowy whirlwinds,
as a beast it roars sometimes,
it cries sometimes like a child.
Sometimes it whistles hesitatingly
through the creaking roof
or it knocks at our door
like a belated wanderer.]

One thing stands out: none of the three metric translations is 'semantically' faithful to the original, which was to be expected, but they all take different liberties, even within the same language. Can any of them be called adequate? Can the 'linear' one? The latter question gets a ringing NO! Yes, it is close enough to the words Pushkin has selected to convey his sense, but it utterly fails to please: Pushkin would have never forgiven such a translator - *pace* Vladimir Nabokov. Of course, it could be much worse. The first line is after all a neat four-foot trochee and the second a three-foot one; but as the rest of the version shows, it's been pure chance. Any reader who claims to have enjoyed such a prosaic text either is a snob or lacks any ear for language - let alone poetry; probably both. The other translations may not be on the same level with Pushkin, but are much closer to him than the first one.

Let us analyse them: Arndt's storm *'has set the heavens scowling,'* Deutsch's *'dims the sky,'* mine *'grows dark'* (*'darker/darkly,'* the construction is ambiguous), whereas Pushkin's *'with mist the heavens covers.'* Arndt's process is finished, Pushkin, Deutsch's and mine are active. *'Whirling gusty blizzards wild'* and *'Weaves the snow in patterns wild'* are more specific than *'Entwining snowy whirlwinds'* or *'Snowy whirlwinds twisting,'* but the effect is roughly the same. Yes, Arndt's and Deutsch's storms are explicitly fiercer, but Pushkin's and mine are equally roaring; the rest of the strophe makes it plain. Deutsch and Arndt have but gone a different way to get to the same point. With regards to formal correspondence; metrically, all three versions are equally faithful (four-foot trochees in English, octosyllables in Spanish).

Except for the non perfectly consonant rhymes in my third and fourth lines (a capital shortcoming, since Pushkin was a master of form and, had he been writing in Spanish, would have found a way to keep it throughout!), Arndt respects the oxytonic/paroxytonic rhyme pattern; in Spanish, as I mentioned, it would be all but worthless. Deutsch sacrifices rhyming the odd lines, but keeps the paroxytonic/oxytonic alternation (a bad bargain). Also worth noting is the fact that Pushkin and Arndt repeat the 'now' always in the initial position, while I start with 'sometimes' in the end and bring it forward line by line. The effect of repetition is compensated by the displacement, since both call attention to themselves as formal features giving special relevance to the alternation of effects. I explained that the fourth 'sometimes' had been intentionally skipped, since otherwise it would have to turn up in any of the previous positions, and that would spoil the effect; once I decide to go the way of variation rather than repetition, I cannot go back. Both texts are structured according to one principle only.

Deutsch repeats the 'meaning' but changes the 'form' ('now,' 'again'), and only twice. Besides, her sentences and lines do not coincide; again a pity. Also, she alternates between present and present continuous. But, I stressed, this analysis is very much like an autopsy . The proof is in the aesthetic effect. I think Arndt wins, followed by me, with Deutsch a somewhat distant third; all of us a few miles behind Pushkin, I'm afraid. Arndt and Deutsch have an extenuating circumstance: neither of them is writing in their native tongue. I, on the other hand, have no such alibi. Simply put, none of us is a great poet.

By class six they had to start translating themselves into their mother tongue: the one page of Dickens's into Spanish or of Marechal's into English. It was their dress rehearsal for the 'real thing,' the short stories. In the case of my two students who knew no Spanish, they were encouraged to try translating Cortázar anyway, since from then on we would devote all our time to 'reading,' i.e. thoroughly understanding form and content.

First and foremost we wanted to be sure we 'saw' the characters: what did they look like? how old? how rich? how cultivated? Cortázar's dying hero is himself a writer, he has a family and many close and cheerful friends, he is expansive, convivial, a friend of good food and plain if vivid language, occasional bad-mouthed. Somerset Maugham is himself: high-class, sophisticated, xenophobic, somewhat misanthropic, very rich, quintessentially English: the Empire incarnate. We can safely assume "*Liliana*" takes place now; "*Mr. Know-All*" belongs to the post-great-war period. This posed a challenge to the translator: Mr. Kelada's toiletries and clothes cannot be to-day's, the allusion to the American's 'ready-made' suit has to be understood in that context. Cortázar's character uses Argentinisms aplenty, and the scene at the grill must be mouth-watering; but can the innards so relished by the group of friends whet an American reader's appetite? Also, what English will the character be speaking? On the other hand, how will Somerset Maugham sound so unflappably English and Kelada so un-British in a translation?

The classes were thence organised in two halves: first half Cortázar; second half Somerset Maugham. Since there were no Argentines in the group, I told them they had to find out about the *realia* on their own. "Ask an Argentinian." Since none of them was more than 30 years old, I told them to find about the 1920's *realia* in Somerset Maugham on their own. "Ask your grandfather." From class to class the students had to bring whatever they had managed to translate during the week. I gave them precise instructions: quantity could be negotiated, but not quality. Whether five pages or five sentences, they had to do as good a job as they could. The idea was to fine tune what had already been done in order to come up with a better draft next time around.

I don't believe in exams: their translations were it. Since two students would have otherwise been forced to work from an unfamiliar language, they had the option to write a paper on translation; for instance, an analysis of a translation from or into English. Only one student chose this path and wrote an excellent piece on Beckett's own translation of *Waiting for Godot* and hers. The three Spaniards went for the Somerset Maugham, while everybody else opted for Cortázar (one student had to quit for health reasons).

So each half was itself divided between reading a few further pages and reviewing the different translations. Each student read hers. Once a particular version was submitted it was dissected by everybody else. Needless to say, this procedure did not allow for all the Cortázar translations to be scrutinised every class, so they took turns. The Somerset Maugham half (actually less than half the allotted time, of course) went the same way.

I gave two extra classes on Saturdays, wherein I challenged them to attempt poetry I gave them my own Spanish metric version of a quatrain by Emerson for them to (unwittingly) back-translate and the first four verses of Dryden's paraphrase of Horace's Ode. I had in store my own metric version of the Dryden.

Quienquiera me descuenta en vano su alma escuda,
Pretende huir de mí y soy el propio vuelo,
Aquel que duda soy y soy la propia duda
Y soy también el salmo que el Brahamán alza al cielo.

[Whoever counts me out vainly shields his soul,
He tries to flee me and I am the very flight,
He who doubts am I and I am doubt itelf
And I am also the psalm the Brahmin lifts to the heavens.]

They reckon ill who leave me out:
When me they fly, I am the wings;
I am the doubter and the doubt,
And I the song the Brahmin sings.

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Happy the man, an happy he alone,
He who can call to-day his own,
He who secure within can say
"To-morrow do thy worst, for I have lived to-day!"

Feliz solo de aquel que puede decir "Soy
el dueño de este día que me toca
y espetar bravo a la Fortuna loca:
"Me matarás mañana ¡pero he vivido hoy!"

[Happy only he who can say "I am
The owner of this day that is my lot
And bravely say in fickle Fortune's face:
You may kill me to-morrow, but I have lived to-day!"]

The students' translations were not bad, although none of them even tried to go for meter or rhyme. My whole point was to show that it was indeed possible, provided the translator could write decent poetry. Only a translator with as thorough a mastery of Spanish as Dryden had of English could, of course, do real justice to the original... but that went for Cortázar or Somerset Maugham as well.

The *pédagotrad* can teach the craft, but not the art. He can teach to read, and, to a certain extent, to write; to feel and, up to a point, to express... The rest, what magic there will be, *Salamanca non presta*. He can help develop what talent the student may have, but he cannot possibly instill it. And that goes for any art: no conservatory churns out Toscanini's. Since I cannot possibly hope to analyse both stories the pieces and their twelve translations, let me just quote a couple of brilliantly felicitous examples:

a) From Liliana llorando.

Che, y decile a la enfermera que no me joda cuando escribo. / And, tell the nurse not to be such a pain in the ass when I'm busy writing.

...Acosta, que por su parte se tendrá que trajear aunque le cueste, el rey de la campera poniéndose corbata y saco para acompañarme, eso va a ser grande. / ...Acosta... he'll also have to dress up even if it's a nuisance for him, the epitome of the casual dresser putting on a jacket and tie to come along with me, it's going to be great.

b) From Mr. Know-all.

Mr. Know-all / *Don Sabelotodo*

I'm all for us English sticking together when we're abroad. / *Yo soy partidario de que los ingleses cerremos filas cuando andamos ultramar.*

So it can be taught after all, literary, nay, poetic translation. I'm keeping my fingers crossed for another such chance to come my way. It's so much more thrilling than the Consultive Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions!

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